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# MOSES AND THE THAUMATURGES : PHILO'S *DE VITA MOSIS* AS A RESCUE OPERATION

Harold REMUS

**RÉSUMÉ :** Dans le *De Vita Mosis* de Philon, le portrait de Balaam fait contraste avec celui de Moïse. Ce dernier est présenté comme le vrai prophète, qui est en même temps prêtre, thaumaturge et mystagogue. L'ouvrage entend donc prévenir toute fausse conception qui réduirait Moïse au statut de simple magicien. Le grand prophète doit être soigneusement distingué des thaumaturges et magiciens semblables à Balaam, qui pullulent en Égypte au temps de Philon.

**SUMMARY :** Philo's extended treatment of Balaam in the *De Vita Mosis*, denigrating him as a mercenary technician, stands in sharp contrast to his portrait of Moses, the true prophet as well as philosopher-god-king, priest, thaumaturge, and mystagogue — the answer to the longing of Philo's contemporaries for just such a figure. The writing thus serves to rescue Moses from possible misunderstandings of Moses as a mere thaumaturge or as a magician, a reputation attested in a variety of sources. Rather, Moses' command over nature derives from the revelation, received on the mountain, of the noetic reality — knowledge he employs for the benefaction of others. The *De Vita Mosis* thus sets the great leader apart from Balaam-like thaumaturges and magicians in Philo's Egypt, a land noted for such figures. The article situates the writing in a long tradition of rhetoric and biography employed as vehicles both of polemic and praise.

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Over half a century ago F.H. Colson remarked — among “many oddities” in Philo's *De Vita Mosis* — that “the account of Balaam and Balak, which has little to do with Moses himself, is given at disproportionate length.”<sup>1</sup> This particular “oddity,” which does not seem to have received the attention of subsequent scholars, becomes less odd when one recalls that Philo lives in a land associated with thaumaturgy and magic, belongs to a people with a reputation for thaumaturgy, and un-

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1. F.H. COLSON, trans. and ed., *Philo*, Loeb Classical Library (1935), vol. 6, xv. My citations of Philo are from the Greek text in this edition (Cambridge : Harvard University Press ; and London : Heinemann, 1929 ff.) ; the translations are my own.

dertakes to write the life of their lawgiver, a man widely regarded as a thaumaturge and magician. Philo's detailed portrait of Balaam as a counterfeit prophet offers a foil to Moses, the true prophet, and thus would serve to distance Moses from Balaam-like figures in Philo's own time and place to whom his readers, Jewish or pagan, might be attracted. The *De Vita Mosis* might be viewed, then, in some respects as a "rescue operation" telling who Moses "really" (ἐπ' ἀληθείας) was (1.2) — setting him apart from the company of thaumaturges or magicians, past or present, and setting him forth, not only as lawgiver and true prophet, but also as priest and king, the answer to the Hellenistic age's longing for such a figure.<sup>2</sup> This essay will seek to demonstrate that such rescue operations were not unique in the Greco-Roman world, that in showing who Moses really was — and was not — Philo stands in a long tradition of rhetoric and biography, and that such an interpretation of the *De Vita Mosis* contributes to a fuller understanding of the work and the circumstances in which Philo wrote it.

## I. MOSES, JEWS, EGYPTIANS, AND THAUMATURGY

Various scholars have documented the ambivalent attitude of pagans to Judaism and to Moses: laudatory on the one hand, derogatory on the other.<sup>3</sup> Both attitudes are reflected in Philo's writings.<sup>4</sup> At the popular level, but also to some degree among pagan intelligentsia, Moses and the Jews had considerable reputations as thaumaturges and magicians.<sup>5</sup> In the course of recounting the history of magic, e.g., Pliny traces one branch to Moses and the Jews (*Nat. Hist.* 30.11). At his trial on the charge of

2. See E.R. GOODENOUGH, "The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship," *Yale Classical Studies* 1 (1928), 53-102; *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), *passim*; *The Politics of Philo Judaeus: Practice and Theory* (Yale, 1938; reprinted, Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), esp. chap. 5, "Kingship," 86-120; *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (1st ed., Yale, 1940; 2nd, rev. ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), esp. 66-74; W.A. MEEKS, "Moses as God and King," in J. NEUSNER, ed., *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Studies in the History of Religions, Supplements to *Numen*, 14; Leiden: Brill, 1968), 354-371; "The Divine Agent and His Counterfeit in Philo and the Fourth Gospel," in E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, ed., *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity* (University of Notre Dame Center for the Study of Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity, vol. 2; Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 43-67.
3. E.g., Victor TCHERIKOVER, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, trans. S. Applebaum (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America and Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1966), 344-377; E.M. SMALLWOOD, ed. and trans., *Philoni Alexandrini Legatio ad Gaium* (2d ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1970); John G. GAGER, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, vol. 16; New York and Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), and *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). Documents collected in Theodore REINACH, ed. and trans., *Textes d'auteurs grecs et romains relatifs au Judaïsme* (Paris: Société des études juives, 1895), and Menahem STERN, ed. and trans., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974, 1980, 1984). For those sources that are not well known or readily accessible, I cite their location in Stern by volume and page number.
4. For example, *V. Mos.* 2.20: Jewish traditions, unlike those of other peoples, are attractive to barbarians, Greeks, *et al.* *The Flaccus and Embassy to Gaius*, on the other hand, are detailed defenses of Jews against slanders and attacks.
5. See esp. GAGER, *Moses*, chap. 4.

practicing magic, Apuleius names Moses as one of those persons "famous among magicians" (*inter magos celebratus*, *Apology* 90) whose names, he implies, are readily accessible since one can encounter them, as he did, while reading well-known authors in public libraries (91). Moses, says Celsus, deceived the Jews through his sorcery (γοητείας, *Contra Celsum* 5.41 ; cf. 1.23). Origen reports that Egyptians, insofar as they credit Moses' miracles, allege that they were done by sorcery (γοητεία, *Contra Celsum* 3.5) ; he once asked some Jews how they responded to charges that Moses was a sorcerer (γόητα) who seemed to work his wonders through sleight of hand (μαγανεία, 1.45).

These traditions, dating from roughly the time of Philo and extending through three centuries, are paralleled by others that associate Jews generally with occult knowledge and arts. The Jews, says Posidonius (as cited by Strabo, *Geog.* 16.2.43), are sorcerers (γόητας) who claim they extract asphalt through incantations (ἐπωδάς), urine, and other evil-smelling fluids. Pompeius Trogus portrays Joseph as learning magical arts after being sold into slavery in Egypt, where his mastery of prodigies and skill in interpreting dreams and his phenomenal knowledge both of divine and human law enabled him to predict famine and imparted to his oracles an aura of divinity (*Hist. Philippicae*, Epit. 2.7 ; Stern, vol. 1, 335). Moses, who led the Jews in their rebellion against the Egyptians, was their guide (ἐξηγητής) in the sorcery (γοητεία) to which they are inclined, says Celsus (*Contra Celsum* 1.26). They trace their lineage back to the first offspring of sorcerers and deceivers (γοήτων καὶ πλάνων ἀνθρώπων, 4.33). How widespread the association of Jews with wondrous arts was is indicated by Lucian's including, as a stock figure in one of his satires, a Jew chanting spells (ἐξάδει, *Gout* 173) and by the frequent appearance, in the ῥήσις βαρβαρική familiar in thaumaturgy and magic,<sup>6</sup> of various Hebrew names of the Jewish God as well as the names of Jewish patriarchs.<sup>7</sup> Origen attests to this practice both among Jews and among "virtually all who occupy themselves with incantations and magical arts" (τὰ τῶν ἐπωδῶν καὶ μαγειῶν) and explains it as owing to the power inhering in these Hebrew names (*Contra Celsum* 4.33 ; similarly, 1.22), in-

6. See R. BULTMANN, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (FRLANT, vol. 29 ; 3d ed. ; Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 238 ; *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. J. Marsh (Oxford : Blackwell, 1963), 222 ; H.D. BETZ, *Lukian von Samosata und das Neue Testament : Religionsgeschichtliche und paränetische Parallelen. Ein Beitrag zum Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti*, (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, vol. 76 ; Berlin : Akademie Verlag, 1961), 153-155 ; A.D. NOCK, "Greek Magical Papyri," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 15 (1929), 229, as reprinted in his *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Zeph STEWART (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1972), vol. 1, 189.

7. See *ibid.*, 228-229 (*Essays*, vol. 1, 188-189) ; M.P. NILSSON, *Die Religion in den griechischen Zauberpapyri*, (Bulletin de la Société Royale des Lettres de Lund 1947-1948, vol. 2 ; Lund : Gleerup, 1948), 5-8 ; Campbell BONNER, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press and London : Geoffrey Cumberlege and Oxford University Press, 1950), 26-32, 170-171 ; Martin RIST, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob : A Liturgical and Magical Formula," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 57 (1938), 289-303 ; GAGER, *Moses in Graeco-Roman Paganism*, 140-161, and *Origins of Anti-Semitism*, 108-110.

deed in the very sounds (ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις φθόγγοις) of the names, which must therefore be left untranslated if they are to exert their power (5.45).<sup>8</sup>

The Jews' connection with Egypt, through the stories of Joseph, Moses, and the Jews' bondage there, underscored their association with thaumaturgy and magic, for Egypt was commonly regarded (in the words of John Chrysostom) as "the mother of magicians, which contrived and passed on to others every kind of sleights of hand" (*Hom. in Matt.* 8.4) and Egyptians were seen as excelling in the practice of magic.<sup>9</sup> Once again, Lucian offers a stereotype in Pancrates, an Egyptian holy man (ἀνὴρ ἱερός) who rides on and cavorts with crocodiles and works many wonders (*Lover of Lies* 34).<sup>10</sup>

That Philo, a learned, cosmopolitan resident of a cosmopolitan city, would have been acquainted with such traditions regarding Moses, the Jews, and Egypt is *prima facie* likely and is suggested by various passages in his writings. Some, says Philo, revile Moses as a sorcerer and garrulous scoundrel.<sup>11</sup> From the exodus story (Exod. 7:11 ; 8:18-19 ; 9:11) Philo knows of adepts in occult arts and magicians (σοφίσται καὶ μάγοι) at Pharaoh's court (*V. Mos.* 1.92). Marketplace diviners and tricksters were a common sight in the Greco-Roman world,<sup>12</sup> and Philo, though drawing on LXX terminology,<sup>13</sup> is probably speaking from first-hand experience<sup>14</sup> when, in his treatise on dreams, he mentions "all the adepts [σοφίσται] of Egypt" — omen-prophets, belly-prophets, marvel-prophets (οἰωνομάντεις, ἐγγαστρίμυθοι, τερατοσκόποι) — who are clever at ensnaring, enchanting, and soothsaying (παλεῦσαι καὶ κατεπᾶσαι καὶ γοητεῦσαι); eluding their seductive arts (τὰς ἐπιβούλους τέχνας) is a great feat, says Philo (*De somniis* 1.220). Most people are apt to fall prey to divination (μαντικὴν, *De spec. leg.* 1.60). Would Philo's fellow Jews perhaps be

8. Cf. LUCIAN, *Alexander* 13 : The budding prophet Alexander utters unintelligible, perhaps Hebrew or Phoenician, sounds.

9. Thus Numenius (*De bono*, in EUSEBIUS, *Praep. Evangel.* 9.8.1), speaking of Jannes and Jambres, traditional opponents of Moses at the court of Pharaoh (2 Tim. 3:18 ; further references to Jannes and Jambres in STERN 2,213).

10. See, further, among the Christian fathers, ORIGEN, *Comm. in Matt.* 13.6 : Egyptian enchanters (ἐπασιδοῖς) promise a cure for lunatics. JEROME, *Vita S. Hilarionis* 21 : a frustrated suitor goes to Memphis to acquire magical arts (*magicus artibus*) that will give him power over the beloved. ATHANASIUS, *Vita S. Ant.* 79 : "incantations of Egyptians [αἱ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἐπασιδαί]."

11. γόητα καὶ κέρκωπα λόγων, *Hypothetica* 8.6.2 (γόητα, 8.6.3) ; the same phrase occurs in a papyrus fragment, LIDDELL-SCOTT-JONES, *Greek-English Lexikon*, s. v. κερῶψ, 2. According to Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.145, Apollonius Molon (1st c. B.C.E.), Lysimachus (2d or 1st c. B.C.E.), and "some others" maligned Moses as a sorcerer and deceiver (γόητα καὶ ἀπατεῶνα).

12. The association of such persons with the Circus Maximus in Rome was well known (e.g., CICERO, *De divinatione* 1.132, *de circo astrologos*), so that Horace speaks of the "trickstering Circus" (*fallacem Circum* ; *Satires* 1.6.113) ; in public places like the Circus and the Forum he listens to prophets (*divinis* ; *ibid.* 1.6.114). Apuleius tells of a marketplace *propheta* who resuscitates a corpse (*Metam.* 2.28-29). Celsus lists diviners (τερατοσκόποις) among those one might happen to encounter (*Contra Celsum* 1.9) and speaks of Egyptian-taught sorcerers (γοητῶν) who, for a few coins, work marvels in the marketplace (1.68).

13. See the Mosaic prohibitions and Philonic references to them cited in n. 20 below.

14. That Philo was no recluse is evident from the fact that he was chosen for the Jewish delegation to Gaius (*Legatio ad Gaium*) and from passages where he speaks of going to the theatre (*De ebriet.* 177), watching chariot races (*De provid.* 58), and spending time in the marketplace (*De somniis* 2.91), and those where he gives details of the gymnasium (*De provid.* 46) and the arena (*De mutat. nomin.* 160) that suggest firsthand observation.

taken in, perhaps even associating Moses with pagan divinatory arts and with mercenary marketplace thaumaturges and magicians?<sup>15</sup> Or would the Egyptians and the Alexandrian rabble, so excitable, so irascible, make the association, thus adding still another arrow to their anti-Jewish quiver?<sup>16</sup> Would it not be well to dissociate Moses from any such suspicions, even as Origen, two centuries later, felt compelled to defend Moses against Celsus' charge of *goēteia* (*Contra Celsum* 3.5)? Such would seem to be part of Philo's intent in undertaking to deliver Moses from the "bewitching influence" (βασκανίαν, *V. Mos.* 1.4) of ignorant and irreverent pagan authors by giving a true account of this "greatest and most consummate man" (1.1-4).

Given the delicate political situation of Jews in Alexandria and the smoldering resentment of them,<sup>17</sup> any portrait of Moses would have to be carefully constructed. Since in Egypt the invention of magic and the use of spells was attributed to deity,<sup>18</sup> and since for many in the Greco-Roman world magic was held in honor both in principle and in practice,<sup>19</sup> Philo could conceivably have turned the reputation of Moses as thaumaturge and magician to his advantage, much as Apuleius, on trial for practicing magic, launches into praise of magic as an initial rhetorical ploy (*Apol.* 25-26), or as Origen, in defending Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, points to the effective use of their names in spells and magic (τῶν ἐπωδῶν καὶ μαγείων) as proof of the divinity of these Hebrew patriarchs (*C. Cels.* 4.33-34). Significantly, Philo does not take such

15. That Jews would not be immune to them is suggested by the syncretistic blend of Jewish and pagan elements in the magical papyri, amulets, and curse tablets; A.D. NOCK, "Greek Magical Papyri" (cited above, n. 6), 228-229 = *Essays*, vol. 1, 188-189; GAGER, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (cited above, n. 3), 135-136, and *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 27; cf. R.G. HAMERTON-KELLY's remark, in his review of J. LAPORTE, *La doctrine eucharistique chez Philon d'Alexandrie* (in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 [1973], 631): "[...] I am no longer convinced that the attempt to separate 'Jewish' and 'hellenistic' material in Philo is profitable; it is as difficult and as profitless as trying to separate the Jewish and American elements in the psyche of a Beverly Hills Jew." The commonly accepted view of the *Vita Mosis* as addressed to pagans (E.R. GOODENOUGH, "Philo's Exposition of the Law and his *De Vita Mosis*," *Harvard Theological Review* 27 [1933], 109-125; see L.H. FELDMAN, "Philo of Alexandria," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* [15th ed.; Chicago *et al.*: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974], vol. 14, 246) has been challenged, rightly so, I believe; see D. GEORGI, *Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief: Studien zur religiösen Propaganda in der Spätantike* (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament, vol. 11; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1964), 95, n. 5, and D.L. TIEDE, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, vol. 1; Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), 106-107.

16. Except where a favorable view of Egypt and Egyptians serves PHILO's apologetic purposes (*De spec. leg.* 1.2-3; *Leg. ad Gaium* 138), they generally appear in a bad light: Egypt is passion (πάθος, *De cong.* 83, 85), and Egyptians worship the earth (*V. Mos.* 2.193-195) and in their godlessness (ἀθεότητος) deify animals (*Leg. ad Gaium* 139, 163); such fictions (πλασμαίων) led astray the Israelites who made the golden bull (*V. Mos.* 2.161-162, 270). Egyptians and/or Alexandrians are very excitable (*In Flacc.* 17; *Leg. ad Gaium* 120), jealous (*In Flacc.* 29), given to flattery, trickstering (γοητεία), hypocrisy, and loose talk (*Leg. ad Gaium* 162) and to congregating in lazy, idle, troublesome mobs (*In Flacc.* 33, 37, 41) inclined to slander and evil ways (*ibid.* 33, 34) and to anti-Jewishness (*ibid.* 29; *Leg. ad Gaium* 120).

17. SMALLWOOD, *Philoni Alexandrini* (cited above, n. 3), 3-14; MEEKS, "Divine Agent" (cited above, n. 2), 54.

18. A.D. NOCK, "Greek Magical Papyri," 228 = *Essays*, vol. 1, 188.

19. Examples in H. REMUS, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century* (Patristic Monograph Series, vol. 10; Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983), 68-69; "'Miracle or Magic'? Some Second Century Instances," *The Second Century* 2 (1982), 151.

an approach. Aside from the Mosaic prohibitions, which Philo heeds,<sup>20</sup> there was the fact that the practice of magic was both illegal and/or socially unsanctioned<sup>21</sup> and thus sufficiently reprehensible to function, without explanation, as a convenient slur, justifying Robert Grant's dictum that in much ancient polemic "your magic is my miracle, and vice versa"<sup>22</sup> and leading to spirited rescue operations of one's thaumaturge. Philostratus' life of Apollonius of Tyana is a third-century C.E. example of how a person widely regarded as a magos<sup>23</sup> is portrayed instead as a thaumaturgical philosopher and holy man.<sup>24</sup> Among Christians there are the gospel portraits of Jesus aimed at precluding possible misunderstandings of him as simply a thaumaturge,<sup>25</sup> and the vigorous defenses of Jesus or his followers against charges of magic.<sup>26</sup> There is also self-defense: Apuleius of Madaura defends himself against such charges (*Apology*).

Biography and rhetoric offered models and means for distancing Moses, and thereby also Jews and Judaism, from similar charges and suspicions. By the time of Philo biography was not only a vehicle for setting forth an ideal type that reflected

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20. Prohibited (LXX): Exod. 22:17, φαρμακούς (cf. *De spec. leg.* 3.93, οἱ μάγοι καὶ φαρμακευταὶ are evildoers of the worst sort); Lev. 19:31, ἐγγαστριμύθοις καὶ τοῖς ἐπασιδοῖς; 20:6, *idem*; Deut. 18:10-11, μαντεύομενος μαντείαν, κληδιζόμενος καὶ οἰωνίζομενος, φαρμακός, ἐπαείδων ἐπαιδίην, ἐγγαστριμύθος καὶ τερατοσκόπος (cf. *De spec. leg.* 1.60: Moses excludes from his *politeia* θύτας, καθαράς, οἰωνοσκόπους, τερατοσκόπους, ἐπάδοντας, κληδόσιν ἐπανεχοντας).
  21. Illegal: REMUS, *Conflict*, 69-70; "Miracle or Magic'?", 153. Unsanctioned: C.R. PHILLIPS III, "Nullum Crimen sine Lege: Socioreligious Sanctions on Magic," in C.A. FARAONE and D. OBBINK, eds., *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 262.
  22. GRANT, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (2nd ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 93.
  23. G. PETZKE, *Die Traditionen über Apollonius von Tyana und das Neue Testament* (Studia ad Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti, vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 1970), 6, 8, 20-21, 42.
  24. PHILOSTRATUS, *Vita Apollon.* 1.2; W. SPEYER, "Zum Bild des Apollonios von Tyana bei Heiden und Christen," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 17 (1974), 47, and the literature cited there; M.P. NILSSON, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, vol. 2 (2d ed.; Munich: Beck, 1961), 421-425.
  25. Though the Gospel of Mark presents a Jesus who demonstrates, through miracles, that God's reign is beginning, one recent line of interpretation has argued that his "messianic secret" is that these are misunderstood if they are not seen in relation to his suffering and death; Norman PERRIN, "Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark," in H.D. BETZ, ed., *Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage* (Claremont, CA: New Testament Colloquium, 1971), 1-78; W.H. KELBER, ed., *The Passion in Mark: Studies in Mark 14-16* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), e.g., 160-168. In Luke-Acts various passages recall or imitate traditions regarding Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, thus distinguishing Jesus from other Greco-Roman thaumaturges; cf. Thomas Louis BRODIE, "Greco-Roman Imitation as a Partial Guide to Luke's Use of Sources," in Charles H. TALBERT, ed., *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 17-46.
  26. Jesus: JUSTIN, 1 *Apol.* 30; *Dial.* 69.7; TERTULLIAN, *Apol.* 21.7, 23.2; ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum* 1.6, 28, 71; *Clementine Recognitions* 1.42.4; P. BILLERBECK, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 1 (Munich: Beck, 1926), 631. Followers: TERTULLIAN, *Apol.* 23.7; *Act. Pl.* 15, 20; *Act. Thom.* 20, 96, 98, 102, 104, 114, 116, 117, 123, 130, 162. On MORTON SMITH's learned placing of Jesus in the category of "magician" (*Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973], *passim*; *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* [New York et al.: Harper & Row, 1973], 101 ff.; *Jesus the Magician* [San Francisco et al.: Harper & Row], 1978) see Alan SEGAL, "Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition," in R. VAN DEN BROECK and M.J. VERMASEREN, eds., *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain, 91; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 349-375, and Susan GARRETT, "Light on a Dark Subject and Vice Versa: Magic and Magician in the New Testament," in J. NEUSNER et al., eds., *Religion, Science, and Magic in Concert and Conflict* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 142-165.

the hopes and aspirations of an age ; writing the life of a representative of a particular people, class, or philosophical school also provided an opportunity to praise those groups.<sup>27</sup> In Philo's *De Vita Mosis* the great Jewish leader is just such an ideal type. Likewise, though Jews in the past might sometimes have demonstrated less than ideal behavior, as Philo faithfully records from the Mosaic scripture (e.g., *V. Mos.* 2.161-66, 213, 277-78), they are nonetheless capable of unsurpassing clarity of sight,<sup>28</sup> they devote themselves to the study of their hereditary philosophy in their synagogues, which are schools of every kind of virtue (2.216), and they are always offering prayers on behalf of the human race (1.149).

Biography, on the other hand, could also be employed to polemicize against rival schools of philosophy or political leanings by denigrating representatives of these.<sup>29</sup> In this, biography is closely related to the rhetor's encomium, with its categories of praise and censure,<sup>30</sup> each serving to set off and heighten the other. By first praising Flaccus' virtues (*In Flacc.* 2-5), says Philo, he makes the evil of this enemy of the Jews all the more evident (*ibid.* 6-7). By depicting in detail the wickedness of Balaam, a past enemy of the Jews, Philo enhances Moses' stature, and by setting forth in detail how, because Moses is a true prophet and God's partner, he can work miracles, Philo sets him apart from Balaam and present-day manifestations of Balaam and Balaamry.

## II. BALAAAM — MERCENARY TECHNICIAN

It is clear that Philo places Balaam among those marketplace diviners mentioned earlier. Philo labels him a *magos* (1.276) and a *mantis* (1.276, 283, 285). The various terms Philo uses to designate Balaam's art<sup>31</sup> are not pejorative in themselves<sup>32</sup> — the praise or blame lay in the eye of the beholder<sup>33</sup> — but in the *De Vita Mosis* as well as

27. Arnaldo MOMIGLIANO, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1971), 51-52, 96 ; Patricia COX, *Biography in Late Antiquity : A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley et al. : University of California Press, 1983), XIV, 8-9, 13-16. ISOCRATES (*Euag.* 77) praises Euagoras so that his (Greek) family will imitate him rather than foreign models (ἄλλοτρίους παραδείγματα) ; XENOPHON, *Agelaios* 9.1-5, contrasts this Spartan favorably with Persian rulers.

28. *V. Mos.* 2.271 ; on the importance of sight for Philo see below, n. 38, and MEEK's observations, "Divine Agent" (cited above, n. 2), 51-52.

29. MOMIGLIANO, *Greek Biography*, 71-72, 74-75, 84 ; COX, *Biography*, 10-11, 14-16.

30. ἔπαινος and ψόγος : ARISTOTLE, *Ars rhetorica* 1.3.3-6 (1358B-1359A), 1.9.1 (1366A), 32-33 (1367B). *Laus* and *vituperatio* : CICERO, *De Inventione* 2.59.177-78 ; PS.-CICERO, *Ad Herennium* 3.6.11-7.15 ; QUINTILIAN, *Institutio Oratoria* 3.7. Cf. PHILO, *V. Mos.* 1.154 : Moses' law prescribes censures (ψόγοι) and praises (ἔπαινοι) ; similarly PLATO, *Gorgias* 483B, where Callicles associates lawgivers, laws, and ἔπαινος and ψόγος.

31. μαντεία, οἰωνοσκοπία (*V. Mos.* 1.264) ; τὰ (τῆς) μαντικής (1.264, 285) ; προλέγειν, προθεσπίζειν (1.265) ; προφήτης (1.266) ; his art (τέχνη) has to do with "chance utterances and birds" (κληδόνας καὶ οἰωνούς, 1.287), "birds and auspicious pronouncements" (οἰωνούς καὶ φήμας αἰσίους, 1.282).

32. See LIDDELL-SCOTT-JONES, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v.v. Of these terms, μαντεία occurs in the LXX account at Num 22:7 but as the plural of τὸ μαντεῖον and in the sense of rewards for divination ; it occurs in the singular in 23:23, as does οἰωνισμός. Other Mosaic and Philonic occurrences and terminology in n. 20 above.

33. See H. REMUS, "Does Terminology Distinguish Early Christian from Pagan Miracles ?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982), 531-551, and "'Magic or Miracle' ?" (cited above, n. 19), 127-156.



in his other writings<sup>34</sup> Philo does not leave in doubt what he thinks of them and of Balaam.

One common contemporary means that Philo employs to denigrate Balaam is the discrediting of his motives.<sup>35</sup> Although Balaam poses as one of those prophets (προφητῶν) who do nothing apart from an oracle (χρησμών) (1.266), in fact his dreams and visions are feigned (1.268).<sup>36</sup> He goes to Balak, not because he has a divine command to do so, although he alleges (προφασίζόμενος) he has, but because he is enticed by the wealth held out to him by Balak's emissaries, whose dignity is also said to awe him (1.268). He is, thus, motivated, not by lofty and firm resoluteness of mind (1.266), but by love of gain and deference to rank (1.286)<sup>37</sup> and by conceit and by hatred of Israel (1.286). Far from wishing to serve God, he deliberately opposes God's will when he finally does perceive it (1.287, 294-95). Philo capitalizes on the irony in the situation where a beast sees what is, it seems, a divine vision (ὡς ἔοικε, θεία τις ὄψις), while the famous seer sees nothing, thus demonstrating his obtuseness (εἰς ἔλεγχον ἀναισθησίας) (1.272). For Philo, for whom sight is the most superior and least deceptive of the senses,<sup>38</sup> Balaam's imposture and base motives stand clearly exposed by the fact that Balaam, after having finally seen the divine vision and groveling before it, then asks whether he should return home. The angel perceives his dissimulation and is angered by it — "for why was it necessary to inquire about a matter so obvious [περὶ πράγματος οὕτως ἐμφανοῦς], which carried its proofs [ἀποδείξεις] in itself and did not require assurance through words, as

34. Balaam means "empty" (μάταιος, *De conf. ling.* 159), "the empty one" (ὁ μάταιος, *De migr. Abr.* 113), "empty people" (μάταιον λαόν, *De cherub.* 32); he is a "bird prophet and marvel-gazer" (οἰωνόμαντιν καὶ τερατοσκόπον), an "emptier" (ματαιάζοντα) dealing in "baseless conjectures" (τὰς ἀβεβαίους εἰκασίας, *De conf. ling.* 159); "the sophist Balaam" (ὁ σοφιστὴς βαλαάμ) was "an empty congeries of opposing and conflicting opinions" (μάταιος ὦν ὄχλος ἐναντίων καὶ μαχομένων δοξῶν, *Quod deter.* 71), even as sophists generally say one thing but think and act another (*ibid.* 72-73); that Balaam was of earth rather than heaven is shown from his following of "omens and false prophecies" (οἰωνοὺς καὶ ψευδέσι μαντείαις, *Quod deus immut.* 181); Balaam, the bird-gazer (τὸν οἰωνοσκόπον, *De mut. nomin.* 203), did not profit from hearing God's oracles (202) and with his "mantic sophistry" (σοφιστεία μαντική) opposed God-sent prophecy (203).

35. Examples from the first two centuries C.E. in REMUS, *Pagan-Christian Conflict* (cited above, n. 19), 41-42.

36. The MT and LXX, in Num 22:12 and 22:20, say that God actually spoke to Balaam, telling him to go with Balak's emissaries. Philo, however, follows the tradition in the story of Balaam's ass according to which Balaam makes the journey against God's will (Num 22:22). Hence Philo denies that God has spoken to Balaam: after Balaam first says that the Divine forbids him to go (1.266), Philo states that Balaam's later claim that God now commands him to go is, "once again" (πάλιν), a dishonest claim (1.268); the LXX's καὶ ἦλθεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς βαλαάμ νυκτὸς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ (Num 22:20) Philo turns into a mere claim (ἔλεγε) of dreams and visions on Balaam's part (1.268).

37. Cf. *De migr. Abr.* 114: for the sake of a fee (ἐπὶ μισθῷ) Balaam aligned himself with Israel's enemies and thus "became an evil prophet of evil things" (μάντιν γενέσθαι κακὸν κακῶν); his mind, hateful of virtue (ἡ μισάρετος διάνοια), fathered base intentions. *De cherub.* 33: people like Balaam who pursue their occupations to acquire wealth blame the occupations when troubles befall them even though good prophets (ἀγαθοὺς μάντις) have forewarned them.

38. See, e.g., *V. Abr.* 57, 60, 150, 153, 156, 158-62, 166. PLATO, *Tim.* 47AB, posits the superiority of sight; similarly PHILO, but with reference to the nature of divine revelation added: because God's words are works (cf. *V. Mos.* 1.283, ἔπει ὁ λόγος ἔργον ἐστὶν αὐτῷ) they therefore must be seen rather than heard; see *De decalog.* 47 and *De mig. Abr.* 47, which cite Exod 20:18 (cf. *V. Mos.* 2.313), and H. JONAS, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, Part 2/1, *Von der Mythologie zur mystischen Philosophie* (FRLANT, vol. 63; 2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 94-97, 119.

though ears were more truthful than eyes, and words [ῥήματα] than works [πραγμάτων]" (1.274) ?<sup>39</sup>

The biblical account of Balaam is already keenly ironic : a foreign diviner is made to serve God's purposes, to confound an enemy of Israel, with the superiority of Israel's God implicit throughout. In describing the processes of divination, Philo heightens certain aspects of the account in order to discredit Balaam further. The biblical account states that God puts the words into Balaam's mouth (Num 22:38 ; 23:5, 12) or that the spirit takes possession of him (23:7, LXX ; 24:2). What more could one ask of prophets than that they utter God's words or speak by God's spirit ? But in speaking God's oracles, which he comes to recognize as true (1.294), Balaam neither understands what he is doing (οὐ συνιέντος, 1.274) nor is he on God's side. Balaam is God's instrument, like other prophets, but an unwilling and, so to speak, inanimate one. Thus, for the Giver of speech and of the organs of speech, to direct Moses' tongue is one thing, because Moses is God's friend and on the side of justice (see below, sec. 3). But with Balaam, God must work to accomplish his purposes without the consent of the diviner's mind (ἄνευ τῆς σῆς διανοίας, 1.274), "prompting the words that need to be spoken [...] and directing your organs of speech to what is just and useful" (1.274). When Balaam is to deliver his first oracle, he becomes possessed (ἔνθους) as the prophetic spirit (προφητικοῦ πνεύματος) falls upon him (1.277).<sup>40</sup> This spirit drives out Balaam's mantic art (τὴν ἔντεχνον μαντικὴν), "for magical sophistry [μαγικὴν σοφιστείαν] may not abide in the same soul with the most sacred kind of inspiration [ἱερωτάτῃ κατοκωχῇ]" (1.277). Thus emptied of his art, Balaam speaks as a prophet (ἐρμηνεύς) who prophesies what another prompts him to say (ὑποβάλλοντος ἑτέρου θεσπίζει τάδε) (1.277).<sup>41</sup>

The situation is similar with the second round of sacrifices and oracles. After the sacrifices, Balaam "was suddenly divinely possessed [θεοφορεῖται], and, understanding nothing [μηδὲν συνιείς], as though his faculty of reason were wandering, spoke in prophecy these words which another supplied to him [ὥσπερ μετανισταμένου τοῦ λογισμοῦ, τὰ ὑποβαλλόμενα ἐξελάλει προφητεύων τάδε]" (1.283). The oracle Balaam then utters offers a revealing Philonic reading of the Greek text at Num 23:23a,b (οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν οἰωνισμὸς ἐν Ἰακώβ οὐδὲ μαντεία ἐν Ἰσραὴλ) : because God has delivered the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage, says Philo, they pay no heed to omens (οἰωνῶν) and prognostication (μαντικὴν) because they put their trust in One who is the ruler of the world (1.284). This general statement receives its concrete illustration in the *De Vita Mosis* in the contrast between Balaam — the magos, omen-gazer, and prognosticator — and Moses, God's prophet.

39. Ἀπόδειξις is used frequently in *V. Mos.*, sometimes with ἐναργής or ἐμφανής, to designate clear and certain proofs of divine action ; see 1.95 ; 1.196 ; 2.177 ; 2.262. That πράγματα are superior to ῥήματα accords with PHILO's customary view of miracles in the *V. Mos.* : they are works (πράγματα, ἔργα), more compelling and urgent than mere words ; thus 2.280, "not speech [λόγος] but deeds [ἔργα, i.e., miracles] will teach them" (evildoers) ; 2.253, at the Red Sea the Israelites experienced in ἔργους (i.e., the parting of the waters, etc.) the truth of Moses' oracle (λόγιον). God's words, however, are works ; see preceding note.

40. In introducing the πνεῦμα at this point PHILO would seem to be following Num 23:7, καὶ ἐγενήθη πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπ' αὐτῷ [cf. 24 : 2], καὶ ἀναλαβὼν τὴν παραβολὴν αὐτοῦ εἶπεν (MT has simply מִן הַיָּם וְהָיָה).<sup>41</sup>

41. On the term ἐρμηνεύς see GOODENOUGH, *By Light, Light* (cited above, n. 2), 193, n. 70.

The third round of oracles leaves no doubt about the utter haplessness and degradation of the seer. Though he now knows that what he speaks is God's word (1.287, 294), yet "in his heart he longed to curse [Israel], even if he was being prevented from doing so with his voice" (1.286). He has come to despise the art of prediction (1.287) that had brought him fame and fortune (1.264-66). Philo seems to be saying that Balaam must now recognize that art for what it is, merely an art (τέχνη, 1.287)<sup>42</sup> with no link to the spirit sent by God who chooses certain individuals to make known his will. Yet, having once more served as the unwilling mouthpiece of God (1.288-91), Balaam shamelessly counsels Balak on how to subvert the divine will (1.294-99), so that Philo, shocked at this unbridled sacrilege (ἄσέβημα ... μέγιστον), is moved to exclaim, "'Why,' one might ask, 'do you act on your own and presume to give counsels opposed to the [divine] oracles as though your counsels were mightier than the [divine] utterances?'" (1.294). The very opposite of all that Moses embodies and seeks to inculcate is what Balaam counsels: total surrender to the passions with forgetfulness of the promptings of reason and the ways of the fathers (1.295-99).

In sum, Balaam is a counterfeit prophet and his *technē* a parody of prophecy, even as Gaius is "a counterfeit image of deity" and parodies divine kingship.<sup>43</sup> And as rabbinic literature would later identify Balaam with various enemies, past or present, of the Jews,<sup>44</sup> so Philo's portrait suggests that "Balaam" still practices his arts in the streets and marketplaces of Alexandria.

### III. MOSES : PHILOSOPHER-GOD-KING, LAWGIVER, PRIEST, PROPHET, THAUMATURGE, MYSTAGOGUE

Whatever position one takes in scholarly debate over "divine man" figures in the Greco-Roman world,<sup>45</sup> one may safely say that Philo's portrait represents an "ideal type," whether in the common English signification of exemplar, or in the tradition of ancient rhetoric and biography,<sup>46</sup> or in the Weberian sense of a hypothetical con-

42. Note Balak's reproach: Balaam has only brought ridicule on the knowledge on which he once prided himself (*V. Mos.* 1.293).

43. MEEKS, "Divine Agent" (cited above, n. 2), 52; 49-54.

44. Judith R. BASKIN, *Pharaoh's Counsellors: Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (Brown Judaic Studies, vol. 47; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 79, 92-93.

45. Two aspects of the debate are represented in MEEKS, "Divine Agent" (cited above, n. 2), who takes the term "divine man christology" as "not a completely satisfactory one" but serviceable "as a shorthand way of saying that the apologetic literature produced by various religious, ethnic, and philosophical groups in Roman Hellenism often depicts important figures as somehow intermediary between the divine and human" (p. 43), but eschews attempts to construct "an artificial stereotype of the divine man as a foil for New Testament exegesis" (p. 44). The debate is surveyed in E.V. GALLAGHER, *Divine Man or Magician? Celsus and Origen on Jesus* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, vol. 64; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), chap. 1. Much of the current discussion of the "divine man" focuses on L. BIELER, *ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ: Das Bild des "Göttlichen Menschen" in Spätantike und Frühchristentum*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Höfels, 1935, 1936; reprinted in one vol., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967). GALLAGHER, *Divine Man*, 10 ff., argues cogently for the methodological soundness of Bieler's study and for the view that Bieler's work has been misunderstood and misused.

46. COX, *Biography* (cited above, n. 27), 9, 12.

struct, an exaggeration from a particular viewpoint.<sup>47</sup> At a number of points Philo's portrait also conforms to the ideal type that Ludwig Bieler set forth as the "divine man" figure.<sup>48</sup>

For Philo Moses is the ideal ruler<sup>49</sup> and all that that entailed. Philo sets forth at length the qualities of the ideal king and how Moses possesses them all in abundance (1.61-62, 148-54). Alluding to Plato's familiar dictum about philosopher-kings (*Rep.* 5.473D), Philo says that Moses was both (2.2). Indeed, Moses is much more : he is god and king (θεός καὶ βασιλεύς, 1.158)<sup>50</sup> of the Jews. He was their lawgiver (1.1, 162), but, even more, "by divine providence he himself became animate and vocal law" (νόμος ἐμψυχός τε καὶ λογικός, 1.162), a concept associated with the ideal ruler.<sup>51</sup>

In the introductory remarks to the second book of the *Vita* Philo brings together law, justice, and kingship, stating that "the king is an animate law [νόμον ἐμψυχόν] and the law a just king" (2.4). To be such a king and lawgiver, however, Moses needs to be also a priest, "in order that through perfect offerings and through perfect knowledge of the service of God he might ask averting of evils and participation in good both for himself and for those subject to him" (2.5). He must also be a prophet, "in order that those things he was unable to apprehend by reasoning he might discover by God's providence" (2.6). Kingship, lawgiving, priesthood, and prophecy belong together, concludes Philo and connects that linkage with nature :

Beautiful, indeed, and harmonious is the uniting of the four faculties, for entwined with and clinging to one another, they function in concord, receiving and repaying benefits, imitating the virgin Graces whom an unalterable law of nature [νόμος φύσεως ἀκίνητος] forbids to be separated. Of them one may properly say what is often said of the virtues, that whoever has one also has them all (2.7).

In Moses that happy harmony is attained.

47. See T. BURGER, *Max Weber's Theory of Concept Formation : History, Laws and Ideal Types* (Durham : Duke University Press, 1976), 125, 127, 132, 134, 1591 164, *et passim* ; Burger's detailed discussion, with its extensive documentation from Weber's writings and its attention to Weber's methodological concerns, is useful for understanding this much-discussed concept.

48. The references to Bieler in the notes that follow here offer instances, from the *V. Mos.*, of what Bieler (in GALLAGHER's words, *Divine Man*, 13) saw as the purpose of his second volume : "examining the relative congruence between his general type and individual divine men." Implicit in Bieler's exposition is the normal human being as a canon of the ordinary ; see the discussion of the nature and functioning of this canon in the Greco-Roman world in REMUS, *Pagan-Christian Conflict* (cited above, n. 19), 9-13, esp. 12-13.

49. Cf. GOODENOUGH, "Political Philosophy" (cited above, n. 2).

50. On Moses as "god" see GOODENOUGH, *ibid.*, and *Politics* (cited above, n. 2), 110-111, and, in general, D. ROLOFF, *Gottähnlichkeit, Vergöttlichung, und Erhöhung zu seligem Leben : Untersuchungen zur Herkunft der platonischen Angleichung an Gott* (Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte, vol. 4 ; Berlin : de Gruyter, 1970) ; C.H. TALBERT, "The Concept of Immortals in Antiquity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975), 419-436 (on Moses in Artapanus and Philo, p. 423-424).

51. See GOODENOUGH, "Hellenistic Kingship" and *Light, Light* (both cited above n. 2), index. s.v. νόμος ἐμψυχός. One example is a fragment from Diotogenes the Pythagorean (in GOODENOUGH, "Hellenistic Kingship," 65) : "But the king is animate law [νόμος ἐμψυχός] [...]" Gaius, according to Philo, in claiming to be νόμος ἐμψυχός represented a perversion of the concept ; GOODENOUGH, *Politics* (cited above, n. 2), 107-114.

Whence derives Moses' greatness? In accord with biographical and encomiastic conventions,<sup>52</sup> Philo presents it as presaged in Moses' distinguished ancestry (1.7) as well as in his striking physical appearance (1.9, 18),<sup>53</sup> his early maturity (1.18-19), his precociousness (1.21),<sup>54</sup> and his sober demeanor as a child (1.20). Taught the usual fundamentals of Greek, Egyptian, Chaldean, and Assyrian lore (1.23-24),<sup>55</sup> his education nonetheless "seemed [in Platonic fashion] to be recollection [ἀνάμνησιν] not learning" (1.21).

But much more than the customary education of the day is needed to explain that prophetic apprehension of the noetic and incorporeal which Moses possessed and which eclipses apprehension through the senses (2.271). Philo's picture of Moses on the mount elaborates this Platonic view. Moses there sees what Abraham did not see while in Chaldea: the "harmonious and noetic nature of reality outside the world and the perceptible [ἐξω τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τῆς αἰσθητῆς οὐσίας εὐάρμοστον καὶ νοητὴν φύσιν]" (V. Abr. 77). Here, it seems, is the source of Moses' command over nature: on the mount he entered "into the darkness where God was, that is into the unformed, invisible, incorporeal, and archetypal essence of the existents [εἰς τὴν ἀειδῆ καὶ ἀόρατον καὶ ἀσώματον τῶν ὄντων παραδειγματικὴν οὐσίαν], perceiving those things invisible to mortal nature [τὰ ἀθέατα φύσει θνήτη κατανοῶν]" (1.158). Since Moses has seen nature's inner workings, he is able to dispose over them, even as God does.<sup>56</sup> Noah, a lesser man than Moses and one who had not entered into the darkness

52. MOMIGLIANO, *Greek Biography* (cited above, n. 27), 82-83, gives examples of the accepted place of ancestry, childhood, and education in encomium and biography; in addition to the sources that Momigliano cites, XENOPHON's *Cyropaedia* is an early example of how ancestry, education, early promise, and outstanding physical and character attributes (see 1.2.1-4.15) figure in the biography of a great man; in the Empire these elements are present, in varying degree, in Suetonius' and Plutarch's Lives. PLATO, *Menexenus* 237A, cites mention of (noble) ancestry, upbringing, and education as "natural" (κατὰ φύσιν) in an encomium; ARISTOTLE, *Ars rhetorica* 1.9.33 (1367b), regards reference to (noble) ancestry and education as assisting the encomiast's praise of his subject's achievements; the discussion in PS.-CICERO, *Ad Herennium* (likely, 1st c. B.C.E.), of how to depict a life (3.7.13-14) and to expand on praise and censure (3.6.10) is more detailed and includes elements like those mentioned above, which one sees in Philo's depiction of Moses' early years. An early encomium (ca. 370 B.C.E.) embodying these elements is ISOCRATES, *Euagoras* (at 12-19, 22). The fixity of the pattern is evident from the *Homily on the Martyr Gordius* (Migne Patrologia Graeca, vol. 31) by BASIL THE GREAT (d. 379 C.E.) which contrasts (paragraph 2, MPG 31, 492) "the law of encomia" (ἐγκωμίων νόμος), which requires mention of homeland, ancestry, and education, with "the divine school" which knows no law of encomia and counts a person's own deeds as more significant than any of these.

53. ἄσπετος, as in Exod 2:2 (Acts 7:20, Heb 11:23). As an adult, Moses' appearance is also striking (V. Mos. 1.59). Impressive appearance was one of the marks of the ideal king; see GOODENOUGH, "Hellenistic Kingship": Diotogenes (72-73); Ecphantus (77); Xenophon (78-79; the Persian kings used cosmetics and wore elevator shoes). On striking physical appearance as a mark of the divine man see BIELER (cited above, n. 45), vol. 1, 49-54.

54. *Ibid.*, 34.

55. Cf. GOODENOUGH, *Light, Light*, 182-183. The specifics of Moses' education probably correspond to the education Philo received; cf. *De congressu* 6, 11, 14-18, 74-79, and FELDMAN, "Philo of Alexandria" (cited above, n. 15), 245; Samuel SANDMEL, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 12.

56. In his exposition of the nature miracles Philo views nature as cooperative with and subject to God, who, as he once summoned his most perfect work, the cosmos, from non-being to being (*De opific. mundi* 16), can in the same way bring forth plenty in the desert by rearranging the elements (τὰ στοιχεῖα) so that the air bears food (V. Mos. 2.267). In his inspired (2.250) homily to Israel as it cowers on the shore of the sea, Moses asserts that even "the elements of nature" (στοιχεῖα φύσεως, 2.251) conspire against the Israelites;

and hence possessed much less knowledge of God and nature, still had enough to command the creatures. He knew God was gracious and that the human race would survive the flood because of its likeness to God and that nothing God had brought into being would ever perish ; consequently (οὐ χάριν) all the animals obeyed him (*V. Mos.* 2.61). Moses, however, was God's partner (κοινωνός) to whom God gave the whole world (1.155), so that "each of the elements obeyed him as its master, altering its natural property and submitting to his commands" (1.156).

After this detailed explanation of the source of Moses' knowledge and power, one is not surprised to learn that Moses works wonders in nature or that as prophet he is able to expound the meaning of wonders worked by God. When the people ask Moses about manna, this "incredible sight" (ἄπιστος ὄψις, 1.200), Moses' answer reveals that he understands, and can therefore explain, the workings of the cosmos (1.201-02). Balaam the *mantis*, by contrast, may think he sees, but if he does (which Philo disputes), it is only from afar ; pagan thaumaturges may produce what seem to be great marvels, but they are mere sorcerer's apprentices<sup>57</sup> tinkering at the edges of the cosmos. Since they do not know the God of the cosmos and have not entered into the darkness to observe its unseen workings, they cannot know the cosmos as a whole, as God does, and their tinkering can only cause imbalance and disaster that nature must set right again.<sup>58</sup> That is to say, Moses' knowledge of the cosmos and control of the elements is not an arbitrary one, subject to his whims. It is determined by the νόμος of nature, for in God νόμος and φύσις are intimately related : when Moses set out to write his lawbook he combined history with it because he wished to show,

[...] first, that the same father and maker of the world is in fact also the lawgiver, and, second, that he who would keep the laws will welcome the following of nature [ἀκολουθίαν φύσεως] and will live in accordance with the ordering of the universe, his words being in harmony and concert with his deeds and his deeds with his words (*V. Mos.* 2.48).

Moses as lawgiver therefore gives laws that will lead people into harmony with the universe and the principles of nature. Indeed, all that Moses does is for the sake of

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but then through "divine powers" (θεϊαίς δυνάμεσι) these same elements — sea, water, sand, wind — serve to effect Israel's deliverance (2.253-55).

57. Like Arignotus the Pythagorean, in LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA's *Lover of Lies*, who has learned from his master how to work wonders but not enough to control the powers he unleashes.

58. This is seen most clearly in the quashing of the Korah rebellion : "earth and heaven, the first principles of the universe [αἱ τοῦ παντός ἀρχαί], were allotted the retributions of the impious ; for their wickedness, which was implanted on earth, they extended up into the ether — to such a height had they raised it. Therefore each of the [two] elements supplied its punishment, earth bursting and yawning open so that it might drag down and swallow up those who were burdening it, and heaven showering that burden with a most strange rain in order to consume and utterly destroy it in a great flame of fire" (*V. Mos.* 2.285-86). After the cataclysm the earth returns to normal (τὸ ἰσόπεδον), the violators of nature having been removed without a trace (2.287) and harmony restored through God's prophet. Such a striving for harmony in the universe (τῆς τοῦ παντός ἁρμονίας) and for accord with the logos of eternal nature (τῷ λόγῳ τῆς αἰδίου φύσεως) is the whole purpose of Moses' legislation (2.52). Those, therefore, who rebelled against virtue were in fact "enemies, not of humans, but of the whole heaven and cosmos" (2.53) ; hence, evildoers are punished by the elements of nature (2.53-56), while the virtuous are spared natural disasters (or divine retribution, 1.143-46) and singled out for reward (2.57-65).

others (e.g., 1.49-57), which is one of the marks of virtue,<sup>59</sup> and one sees it more clearly because Balaam is just the opposite. Such a picture, of divine benefits mediated through the king, is part of the Hellenistic notion of the ideal king,<sup>60</sup> and in the *Vita* one sees how Moses fits the role as he puts aside natural desires and opinions for the sake of his subjects (1.150-54).

Moses, then, is no puny Balaam, no run-of-the-mill *mantis*. When seen in the larger context in which Philo places him, however, he appears even greater. The great patriarchs of Judaism, whom Philo sets alongside Moses, were themselves no ordinary persons. Moses records their lives for the sake of instruction and emulation, for in those fathers of the Jewish people one beholds “animate and vocal laws [ἔμψυχοι καὶ λόγικοι νόμοι]” (*Abr.* 5) who, self-taught and laws unto themselves (αὐτήκοοι δὲ καὶ αὐτομαθεῖς, *Abr.* 6), lived in accord with the unwritten law. If the patriarchs in their unwritten law are to be emulated, how much more Moses (1.158), the νόμος ἔμψυχος καὶ λογικός *par excellence*, who, beginning where the patriarchs left off,<sup>61</sup> wrote down laws which represent “fragmentary facsimiles of the paradigmatic law written within him.”<sup>62</sup>

Those who imitate Moses will be led beyond the seemingly reasonable and plausible (τῶν εὐλόγων καὶ πιθανῶν, 1.196) — to which Israel is a constant prey in the wilderness and to which Philo’s readers are also susceptible — to the reality that Moses has seen and represents. The *Vita* does not present Moses explicitly as mystagogue, as does *De cherub.* 49. But in imitating the Moses of the *Vita*, readers are taking the propaedeutic steps toward initiation into a mystic Judaism.<sup>63</sup> Those who do so will be ready for the deep truths that Moses teaches, as set forth in Philo’s allegorical writings.

Even in the *Vita*, however, in the death of Moses, one has what can be read as a picture of the mystic ascent toward which those addressed by the *Vita* are to press. A remarkable death was one of the characteristics of extraordinary persons.<sup>64</sup> Philo’s

59. Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Ars rhetorica* 1.9.6 : if virtue is the capacity for conferring benefits, then the greatest virtues are those that are most useful to others.

60. GOODENOUGH, *Light, Light* (cited above, n. 2), 185-186. The divine man also confers benefits (BIELER, vol. 1, 141), including laws (Philostratus’ Apollonius [11.171] declares that the wise man must be like a lawgiver who gives people the commands in which he himself has come to have confidence as well as wonders worked on behalf of others ; BIELER, vol. 1, 102, 111-112, 116, 141).

61. GOODENOUGH, *Light, Light*, 199-200 ; 241.

62. *Ibid.*, 189. On imitation, and what it might mean specifically for Jews in Alexandria to imitate Moses, see the judicious remarks of MEEKS, “Divine Agent” (cited above, n. 2), 45-46, 53-54.

63. GOODENOUGH’s extended argument (*Light, Light*, chap. 7, 8) for Jewish mystery cults has been justly criticized at a number of points ; see A.D. NOCK’s review of *Light, Light* in *Gnomon* 13 (1937), 156-204 (reprinted in his *Essays* [cited above, n. 6], vol. 1, 459-468). By “mystic Judaism” I mean individual mystical experience of the kind Philo describes in *De cherub.* 48-49 in which Moses and the prophets are the hierophants ; on this kind of Philonic mysticism see D. WINSTON, “Was Philo a Mystic ?,” in P.J. ACHTEMEIER, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1978 Seminar Papers*, vol. 1 (Missoula, MT : Scholars Press, 1978), 161-180, esp. 171-175, and cf. the comments of FELDMAN, “Philo of Alexandria” (cited above, n. 15), 246.

64. Cf. BIELER, vol. 1, 48 : “Den Tod überwunden zu haben, ist die letzte Krönung eines ausserordentlichen Lebens.” Examples : Empedocles (M.P. NILSSON, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, vol. 1 [Munich : Beck, 1967], 745) ; Josephus’ reports of the deaths of Aeneas (*Antiq.* 1.64.4), Romulus (2.56.2), Moses

account of Moses' death is a Platonic midrash on the biblical text. His death is a migration (ἀποικίαν) from earth to heaven, an exchange of mortal life for immortality (τὸν θνητὸν ἀπολιπὼν βίον ἀπαθανατίζεσθαι) (*V. Mos.* 2.288). It is the resolution by God of Moses' duality of soul and body into a unity, transforming him wholly into solar-like mind (νοῦν ἡλιοειδέστατον, 2.288). Before his disappearance, however, Moses is twice possessed (κατασχεθεῖς, 2.888 ; καταπνευσθεῖς καὶ ἐπιθειάσας, 2.291) and prophesies, once (2.288-89) foretelling the varied destinies of the twelve tribes (i.e., Deut. 33), and then (2.291) his own death (i.e., Deut. 34). As is fitting for one in tune with, and commanding, cosmic powers, he is buried not by "mortal hands but by immortal powers [ἀθανάτοις δυνάμεσιν]" (2.291).

While this account pales beside the remarkable description of Moses' death in *De virtutibus* (72-77), which may be read for the further light it sheds on the present passage, the latter is significant enough. Here the reader found (1) a confirmation of the trustworthiness of Moses, seen in his overcoming of the last great enemy, and (2) a concise but accurate delineation of the ascent which was the possibility open to all who would take Moses as their guide. His death is described as an ascent (ἐνθένδε ... εἰς οὐρανόν, *V. Mos.* 2.288 ; ἀναλαμβανόμενος, ... εἰς οὐρανὸν δρόμον διπτάμενος, 2.291), in which the present plaguesome duality of σῶμα and ψυχή is dissolved and he is transformed into νοῦς (2.288). But this is essentially what takes place in the mystic ascent : the liberating of the immaterial from the material, so that it may rise up to the immaterial (cf. *De opific. mundi* 70-71 ; *De spec. leg.* 1.207 ; 3.1-2). Those who come so far as the ascent will not likely ask the question raised by the Israelites in the wilderness, "Is not any slavery a lesser evil than death ?" (*V. Mos.* 1.171), for mystic ascent is the anticipation of the final ascent.<sup>65</sup> In both, the figure of Moses, and his writings, are indispensable.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

To regard Moses simply as thaumaturge, or to class him among the marketplace tricksters and diviners of Philo's day, would be to make a serious category mistake. Moses is as distinct and different from them as he is from Balaam. The *De Vita Mosis* might be said to be an extended elaboration of Philo's sarcastic reply to the charge that Moses was a sorcerer and scoundrel (*Hypothetica* 8.6.2 ; supra, n. 11) : "a fine sorcery and knavery [καλῆς μέντοι γοητείας καὶ πανουργίας]" that enabled him, under the most trying conditions, to lead his people to freedom while maintaining concord among them and obedience to himself (*ibid.*) ! Moses' followers, the Jews,

(4.323 ff.), Enoch and Elijah (9.28) (on these passages see GEORGI, *Gegner* [cited above, n. 15], 158-159) ; Apollonius of Tyana's conception of death in Ep. 58 (regarded as "unbedingt echt" by Eduard NORDEN, *Agnostos Theos : Untersuchungen zur Formgeschichte religiöser Rede* [Teubner, 1912 ; repr., Stuttgart : Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956], 337 ; interpretation in GEORGI, *Gegner*, 197) ; Philostratus' accounts of Apollonius' death (*Apoll.* 8.30-31). Lucian of Samosata offers a parody in *The Passing of Peregrinus*.

65. Cf. *Quis rer. div* 263-65 on the death of the mortal in ecstasy ; JONAS, *Gnosis* part 2/1 (cited above, n. 38), 100.



therefore, are also to be dissociated from magic and thaumaturgy — *qualis rex, talis grex*.

For Philo Moses has no peer whatever, as his extended portrait of the great leader makes clear. The affinities of that portrait with ideal types of the Greco-Roman world is skillful apologetic; but the fervor with which Philo writes of Moses, the detail lavished upon him, and the architectonic unity of the overall portrait<sup>66</sup> indicate that his presentation of Moses in the *Vita* is more than clever apologetics — it is his own deeply held conviction about the great leader. Balaam, by contrast, is the specious prophet — alas, still present in Philo's day<sup>67</sup> — who can mislead Philo's contemporaries, Jew or non-Jew. The figures of Balaam and Moses provide Philo with the opportunity again to instruct through personality, as he does with the Hebrew patriarchs.<sup>68</sup> The potential impact of the *De Vita Mosis* is suggested by the fact that biography was seen as a potent form of propaganda, to the point that under Domitian those he considered subversive could even result in death for the author.<sup>69</sup> The contrasting portraits of Moses and Balaam may be read, in part, as Philo's warning to shun such false guides and to look instead to the one true prophet — and priest, philosopher-god-king, lawgiver, mystagogue, and thaumaturge (*V. Mos.* 2.292) — for sure guidance on how to escape their seductive arts (*De somniis* 1.220) and attain to reality.<sup>70</sup>

66. See GOODENOUGH, *Light, Light*, 180-81, 235-237.

67. Cf. Robin SCROGGS' observation "that when Philo reads the general laws in his Bible against male homosexuality he is thinking entirely about the cultural manifestations in his own environment" (*The New Testament and Homosexuality* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983], 88; emphasis in the original).

68. On this aspect of Philo, and as a general Hellenistic trait, see GOODENOUGH, *Light, Light*, 126-128.

69. MOMIGLIANO, *Development of Greek Biography* (cited above, n. 27), 99-100.

70. What MEEKS, "Divine Agent" (cited above, n. 2), 52, says regarding Philo's portrait of Moses in comparison with his portrait of Gaius would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to Philo's portraits of Moses and Balaam: "What Philo seems to be suggesting is that the Jews, since they have the true 'image' of God always set before them in the ideal king-prophet-lawgiver, the perfect *sophos* and best human symbol of God's own Logos, they cannot be taken in by a counterfeit image of deity" — or of prophecy.